

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Cancelled)

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Cancelled)

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6. (Cancelled)

7. (Cancelled)

8. (Cancelled)

9. (Original) An automated processing method for a meat product, the method comprising:

cutting a section of the meat product from a larger section thereof, the section corresponding to a predetermined amount of the meat product to be placed in a package;

slicing the section into a predetermined number of slices that are formed simultaneously in a single slicing operation so that a stack of the slices is formed;

aligning the package with the stack of slices for receipt in the package; and

shifting the stack of slices automatically into the aligned package to avoid manual handling of the stack.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the section cutting includes supporting the larger section on either side of a cutting area and passing substantially parallel planar opposite surface portions of a cutting blade through the larger section with the cutting area providing clearance for the blade to pass therethrough for forming substantially planar end surfaces of the cut meat product section.

11. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the section is sliced by holding opposite cut end surfaces of the meat product section and pushing the cut section through a set of harping blades with the center of the section aligned with the center of blade set to generate substantial equal thickness end slices in a stack.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein the section slicing includes reciprocating the harping blades in a direction transverse to the pushed direction of the cut section.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12 wherein the harping blades are reciprocated by shifting a first predetermined number of the blades in one direction and a second predetermined number of the blades in an opposite direction and then reversing said blade shifting to generate alternate reciprocating slicing movements of the first and second predetermined numbers of blades.

14. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the stack of slices is shifted by engaging one end of the stack and directing the stack into the package with an end of the stack opposite the one end being the leading end to enter the package.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein the section is sliced by orienting the section so that a vertical stack of slices is formed with the opposite ends being vertically spaced from each other, the package is aligned by delivering packages so that an opening therein is aligned below the leading end of the stack, and the stack of slices is shifted by removing a bottom support of the stack with the package opening in aligned position therebelow to allow the stack to undergo a controlled free fall into the package via the engaged trailing end of the stack.